

## Recent U.S. Government Visits and the Upcoming Summer Transfer Season

The past two months have been a very busy time for the Embassy. In March and April, the Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael Leavitt, Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Jackson, and a nine member Congressional Delegation led by Representative Bennie G. Thompson all visited Honduras to tour sites and meet with Honduran officials. The focus of their visits was on public health and security, and they included visits to Puerto Cortes, San Pedro Sula, and Tegucigalpa. These visits continue to underscore the strong interest that the U.S. government has in maintaining close relations with Honduras. We were very happy to support these high level visits, and are thankful to the members of the American citizen community in Honduras that helped to make the visits a success.

As we look forward to the coming months, I would like to point out that the summer months are the regular transfer season for Embassy officers and this summer will be an especially busy season. Starting in June, many of our consular officers will be leaving Honduras for their onward assignments. While new officers will also be arriving during these months, during the transition period, there will be a significant turnover. Many of the officers that you may have had contact with previously will be transferring to other assignments, and you will begin to see many new faces in the Consulate. While we will maintain normal operation throughout the summer, during the month of May, we are fortunate to have a full complement of experienced officers at our disposal. If you anticipate needing to come in for visa or passport services in the next few months, you may find May to be the most convenient.

*Ian Brownlee, Consul General*

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***The Embassy would like to remind all American visitors and residents in Honduras to register with the Embassy at:***  
***<http://travel.state.gov>***

## Embassy Holds Meeting for Missionary Groups

Thousands of American volunteers come to Honduras each year prepared to build schools, install water projects and provide medical care in charitable projects, but they also need to come prepared in case something goes wrong.

That was the message of a special town hall meeting this month at the American Embassy with representatives of some 40 non-profit and missionary groups who regularly bring volunteers to Honduras to work on a wide range of projects. A similar meeting was held in Houston earlier this month with mission groups based in that area.

The program, which was sponsored by the Embassy's Consular Section, was designed in particular to share the lessons learned from the recent tragic truck accident in a remote area of Olancho that left three Americans dead and

several severely injured. In addition to the suggestions offered by the Embassy, agencies had an opportunity to share their own best practices at the session.

"Unfortunate things do happen," Consul General Ian Brownlee told the 80 people in attendance. "There have been deaths and serious injuries in two major accidents in the last three years, but it could have been worse if these groups had not been as prepared as they were."

Ambassador Charles Ford reminded the group that the #1 priority of the Embassy is to protect American interests in the country. He said the work by missionary groups and non-profit organizations is an important part of American diplomacy abroad.

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## Missionary Group Meeting cont.



Consul General Ian Brownlee addresses missionary groups operating in Honduras

He urged program coordinators to be informed about the country and to let the Embassy know of their plans by registering their volunteers through the State Department website ([travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov)). Volunteers can register online as individuals or as groups.

Members of the Consular Section, which provides services to American citizens, explained what the Embassy can and cannot do for citizens in foreign countries and reviewed a range of issues that all volunteers should be aware of including health and insurance needs, crime and safety, and legal issues.

In particular, speakers emphasized the need for visitors to obtain international medical insurance from an agency that has an office in Honduras as well as insurance for emergency medical evacuations.

Emergency medical care and advanced medical treatment like open heart surgery and neurosurgery are very limited in Honduras, said vice consul Naomi Walcott, but it can be

difficult to return to the U.S. quickly for medical care. She said commercial carriers will not accept sick or injured passengers, and private medical evacuation can cost between \$20,000 and \$30,000.

"We urge your agencies to create imaginary scenarios to determine what you would do, who you would call and how you would pay for it," Ms. Walcott said.

Among those in attendance were representatives of the two organizations whose volunteers have been involved in serious traffic accidents in recent years. As a result of their experiences, they said they have changed many of their practices.

Elizabeth P. Barnwell, executive director of the Atlanta-based Honduras Outreach, which sponsored the Olancho group, said they discovered that not all insurance companies are willing to pay upfront and most private hospitals will not treat patients until they receive payment. Fortunately, the organization had enough

### Main Lessons Learned from the meeting:

- ✓ Be informed. Read the State Department Consular Information Sheet.
- ✓ Register with the US Embassy in Honduras at [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov).
- ✓ Obtain medical evacuation insurance.
- ✓ Obtain travel insurance that will ensure immediate payment at the hospital.
- ✓ Use a seatbelt and ride in well-maintained vehicles.
- ✓ Be alert to your whereabouts and the possibility of crime.

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## Student Visas—Sponsoring Honduran Students

Due to the increased number of American citizens looking to sponsor the education of a Honduran child in the U.S., the Embassy would like to remind all Americans of the important requirements for student visa (F-1 visa) applicants. While the Embassy is responsible for facilitating student visa applications, it is also charged with ensuring that all visa applicants qualify for the visa for which they are applying.

At the time of the interview all F-1 applicants are required to present:

- I-20 form (signed by the school where the applicant has been accepted to study)
- DS-156 and DS-158 visa application forms.
- Evidence of the ability to pay all the costs of tuition and living expenses in the U.S. during the intended course of study.
- A valid passport with at least six months validity remaining and a 2x2 photo.
- Proof of registration and payment into the SEVIS system (I-901)
- Additional information may be requested, including school transcripts



For information on student visas go to:

<http://educationusa.state.gov>

In some recent instances, especially in the cases of younger (elementary or middle school-aged) applicants, Americans have been disappointed that the child they wish to sponsor was turned down for a visa. It is very important to remember that, in addition to the intention to study in the U.S., all student visa applicants must provide sufficient evidence that demonstrates their intention to return to Honduras after completing their normal course of study.

Additionally, the Embassy has seen an increase in attempts to use the F-1 visa process as a way of circumventing the legal adoption process in Honduras. In these cases, while the sponsors normally do have the intention of sponsoring the studies of a Honduran in the United States, they also have the ultimate intention of adopting the child once he/she is established in the U.S. It should be noted that this is not the purpose of the F-1 student visa and prospective adoptive parents should not use this program for children they wish to adopt.

For more information of the F-1 student visa please go to:

<http://educationusa.state.gov/>

[http://honduras.usembassy.gov/english/mission/sections/con\\_non\\_iv.htm](http://honduras.usembassy.gov/english/mission/sections/con_non_iv.htm)

Contributed by: Non-Immigrant Visa Section

# U.S. Citizen Warden Awarded Certificate of Appreciation

A Certificate of Appreciation from the U.S. Embassy was awarded to Mr. Mike Gullikson, a volunteer Warden for the U.S. Citizen community in La Ceiba, for his dedicated assistance in the aftermath of a February 8<sup>th</sup> vehicle accident in Olancho, which killed 3 U.S. citizens and injured several others. Upon hearing of the accident, Mr. Gullikson rushed to the D'Antoni hospital to assist the injured. Over the course of the tragic event, Mr. Gullikson stayed at the hospital and remained a vital contact for the Embassy, the wounded, and their families back in the United States. The Deputy Consul General, Rachel Schofer, presented Mr. Gullikson the Certificate on behalf of Ambassador Ford during a visit to La Ceiba on February 27.



Volunteer Embassy  
Warden Mike Gullikson  
with Deputy Consul  
General Rachael  
Schofer

*Contributed by: American Citizen Services Unit*

## Summer Break—Travel Safety for Students

The following is the Department of State's message to U.S. students, providing important safety information they need to know when traveling abroad:

As the time approaches for spring or summer break, many college students are getting ready for a much anticipated trip abroad. The following information is geared to help students plan a safe and enjoyable adventure.

First, a note about passports: effective in January 2007, all persons - including U.S. citizens - traveling by air from [Canada](#), [Mexico](#), [the Caribbean](#), and [Bermuda](#), will be required to have a passport to enter the United States. This is true even if the foreign country visited does not require a passport for entry. Students who may have previously traveled outside the United States without a passport may not know about this new requirement. Since it can take several weeks to obtain a passport, students are urged to apply now. Information about how to obtain a U.S. passport and traveling abroad, is available on the Department of State's website at <http://travel.state.gov>. Although this new requirement applies only to air travel at this time, we encourage all Americans traveling abroad to have a passport.

## Missionary Meeting cont.

funds to cover the care upfront.

Ms. Barnwell and Todd Unzicker of World Baptist Missions both said their organizations no longer allow volunteers to ride in the back of open trucks. Both have purchased their own vehicles to transport people.

Both praised the Embassy for the help it provided during their emergencies. "There was not a time when I picked up the phone to call, that someone didn't answer my call regardless of the time of the day or night," said Ms. Barnwell.

Consul General Brownlee also urged the groups to retain a Honduran lawyer in case they need legal advice. For example, he said it is not uncommon for the driver in a fatality to be taken to jail after the accident.

As a follow-up to the meeting, the Embassy will compile a listserv of agencies that have programs in Honduras so that it can disseminate information and allow agencies to contact each other.



Consular officers presented some of the lessons learned from the past three years

*Contributed by: Consular Section*

It is also important for travelers to note that the Cricket World Cup will take place at various venues in the Caribbean from March 11, 2007 through April 28, 2007. Accommodations in many instances may be scarce or unavailable. We recommend that travelers exercise heightened security awareness as any large-scale public gathering could be the focus of terrorist acts or other forms of violence.

Travel safety is a major concern. Although most students will have a safe and enjoyable adventure, for some the trip will become a nightmare with a serious impact on the rest of their lives.

Each year, more than 2,500 American citizens are arrested abroad -- about half on narcotics charges, including possession of very small amounts of illegal substances. A drug that is legal in one country may not be legal in a neighboring nation. Alcohol also can cause trouble for U.S. citizens traveling abroad. Students have been arrested for being intoxicated in public areas, underage drinking, and drunk driving. Some people are victimized because they are unaware of the laws, customs, or standards of the country they are visiting.

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## Summer Break cont.

Disorderly or reckless behavior can have serious repercussions. In many countries, conduct that would not result in an arrest in the United States may constitute a violation of local law. Some Americans go abroad assuming that local authorities will overlook such conduct because they are American citizens. The truth is that Americans who violate the laws of the countries they visit may very well be arrested, and they could face severe penalties, including long prison sentences. In fact, some countries have mandatory death sentences for drug offenses.

Being arrested is not the only misfortune that can occur on a foreign vacation. Americans have been badly injured or have been killed in automobile accidents, falls, and other mishaps. Although these incidents are sometimes chance occurrences, many are related to alcohol or drug use. Other Americans have been sexually assaulted or robbed because they found themselves in unfamiliar locales, or were incapable of protecting themselves because of drug or alcohol use, or because they were the victim of a "date rape" drug.

Other safety issues are of major concern as well. Standards of safety and supervision overseas may be different from those in the United States. Many Americans have died after automobile accidents on bad roads and after falls from poorly-fenced balconies. Americans should also exercise caution when swimming or engaging in water sports. Currents on both the Caribbean and Pacific Coasts of Central

and South America can be swift and dangerous, and in many areas there are few lifeguards or signs warning of dangerous beaches. In addition, travelers should be aware that tidal currents before and after storms are strong and unpredictable. Several American citizens drown each year due to riptides or sudden drop-offs while in shallow water. In some countries, the water sports and scooter rental industries are not carefully regulated. Visitors should rent equipment only from reputable operators and should insist on sufficient training before using the equipment. Every year people are killed or injured by the improper use of scooters, jet-skis, and personal watercraft or by the careless operation of such equipment by others. The exercise of simple common sense can help to minimize risks. Americans are strongly urged to register their foreign travel on the State Department's website at <https://travelregistration.state.gov> before the trip begins. Travel registration makes it possible to contact a traveler if necessary, whether because of a family emergency in the United States or because of a crisis in the foreign country. Registration is a free service provided by the State Department and is easily accomplished online. (Note that, in accordance with the Privacy Act, the Department of State may not release information about a citizen to inquirers without express written authorization.)

*Contributed by: Bureau of Consular Affairs (DC)*

## Hurricane Season Reminder from the Department

American citizens considering travel to storm-prone regions during hurricane season should carefully consider the potential dangers and inconveniences associated with their travel before finalizing plans. Those who choose to travel should devise an emergency plan in advance of their departure. Even inland areas far from the coastline can experience destructive winds, tornadoes, and floods from tropical storms and hurricanes.

### **What regions are affected by hurricane season and how?**

Hurricanes can affect the islands in the Caribbean Sea, the northern coast of South America, Central America, Mexico, as well as many areas in the United States. Hurricane damage is caused by storm surge, high winds, heavy rain, flooding, mudslides, and tornadoes.

Regions affected by hurricanes and tropical storms may experience widespread damage to infrastructure and serious shortages of habitable accommodations, food, water, and medical facilities. Storms can result in airport closures or limited flight availability due to runway or terminal damage and a shortage of electricity. Americans in affected regions may be required to delay their return to the United States while staying in emergency shelters with basic resources and limited medicine and food supplies.

### **When is hurricane season?**

Hurricane season runs from the beginning of June to the end of November. The past several years have seen an

overall increase in the quantity and intensity of hurricanes in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Caribbean Sea, and the Gulf of Mexico. In 2005, there were 28 named storms of which 15 became hurricanes. This proved to be the most active hurricane season in recorded history, causing billions of dollars in damage and resulting in thousands of fatalities. In 2006, there were 9 major storms including 5 hurricanes, which largely remained off land, limiting the property damage and loss of life to far below the levels witnessed in 2005.

### **How can I prepare?**

Prior to departure, Americans should register with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. Registration will make your presence and whereabouts known and will make it easier for the Embassy or Consulate to contact you in case of emergency. While Consular Officers will do their utmost to assist Americans in a crisis, travelers should always be aware that when they are abroad, local authorities bear primary responsibility for the welfare of people living or traveling in their jurisdictions. It is important to follow local authorities' instructions concerning security and evacuation; failure to do so has cost people their lives.

Americans traveling during the hurricane season should monitor local radio and other sources of information, such as the [National Hurricane Center](#), to stay aware of any weather developments in the area. Minor tropical storms can develop into hurricanes very quickly, limiting the time available for a safe

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## Hurricane Season Reminder cont.

evacuation. Travelers should maintain close contact with their tour operator, hotel staff, and local officials for evacuation instructions in the event of a weather emergency. Please refer to the following "traveler's checklist" to help you organize an emergency kit.

### Traveler's Checklist:

1. Prior to leaving the United States, register your travel plans on the State Department's [travel registration web-site](#) or at the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.
2. Check with your tour operator, airline, or charter flight company (as appropriate) regarding travel services back to the U.S. in the event of a hurricane, and the possibility of early return if a storm is forecasted for your region.
3. Obtain travel insurance prior to your trip to cover unexpected expenses in the event of an emergency.
4. Research the region you're visiting and be familiar with local medical facilities, public transportation, travel agents, and other emergency resources.
5. Pack a first-aid kit and water treatment purification tablets.
6. Keep extra bottled water and non-perishable food items on hand.
7. Keep an up-to-date list of local emergency phone numbers, as well as contact numbers for the nearest U.S. Embassy, Consulate, or Consular Agency.
8. Protect your vital travel documents from potential water damage by placing them in a waterproof container.
9. Pack a portable, hand-crank or battery-powered weather radio and flashlight with fresh batteries.
10. Obtain a cell phone that works internationally to stay in regular contact with family and friends in the U.S. and advise them of your whereabouts.

11. Leave a detailed itinerary and your local contact information with a friend or family member in the U.S.

For additional information on hurricanes and other tropical storms, please visit the State Department's website on [Natural Disasters](#).

*Contributed by: Bureau of Consular Affairs (DC)*

## Consular Officers Hold Joint Town Hall Meeting in Roatan

On February 28, consular officers from Canada, Great Britain, and the United States held the first joint Town Hall Meeting with citizens of the three countries in Roatan. There was a very good turnout, with approximately 120 people in attendance, of which about 100 were Americans.



Consular officers (L-R)  
Gregory Campbell  
(Canada), Carl Marin  
(Great Britain), and Jill  
Foster (USA)

Photo compliments of The  
Roatan Bruce Show

During the first hour, the consular officers answered questions that pertained to all three countries. After the joint session, they broke into country-specific groups so that the consular officers could field more specific questions.

The Consular Section was very pleased with the turnout of American Citizens and will continue to look for similar opportunities to work with our consular counterparts in the near future.

*Contributed by: American Citizens Services Unit*

## American Accent is Seeking Reader Input

We continue to hope that through this newsletter, Americans can stay in better contact with the Embassy and the rest of the American community throughout Honduras. In our effort to improve this newsletter and make it more useful to our American community, the *American Accent* staff is seeking your submissions of:

**Letters to the Editor:** In order to more adequately address the concerns that members of the American community have, we welcome contributions to the "Letters to the Editor" section of the newsletter. Any American who has questions or concerns that they think could also benefit the American community as a whole, are encouraged to submit letters. The *American Accent* staff will try to print and respond to those letters that deal with issues affecting the entire American community.

**Organizational Profiles:** In past editions we have highlighted a number of charity and non-profit organizations through which Americans are working to assist Honduras. We welcome other organizations to submit a short (150-300 word) description of their group to the newsletter. In each future edition, we will highlight a different group.

**Other Articles:** If you have another topic that you believe would be of interest to the American community, feel free to submit your ideas to the *American Accent* staff. Articles should be between 150 to 300 words in length.

*Contributed by: American Accent Staff*

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**Please register with us at:**

<https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs>